LDREN
NIGHT

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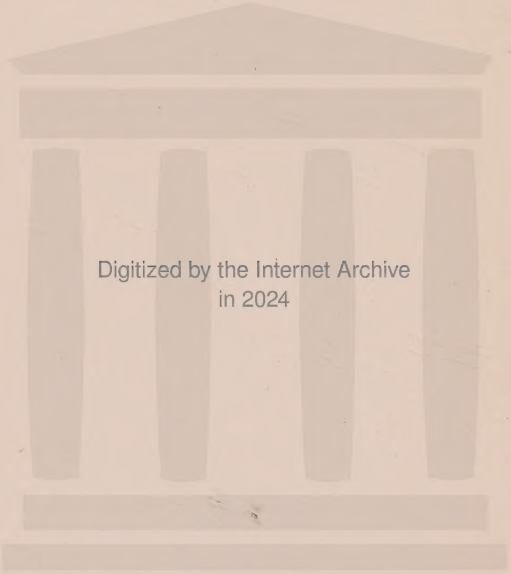
EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON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THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

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The Children of the Night

A Book of Poems

BY

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1910

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TO THE MEMORY

OF

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

48756

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Children of the Night	11
Three Quatrains	13
The World	16
An Old Story	17
Ballade of a Ship	18
Ballade by the Fire	20
Ballade of Broken Flutes	22
Ballade of Dead Friends	24
Her Eyes	26
Two Men	28
Villanelle of Change	29
John Evereldown	30
Luke Havergal	32
The House on the Hill	34
Richard Cory	35
Two Octaves	36
Calvary	38
Dear Friends	39

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Story of the Ashes and the Flame	40
For Some Poems by Matthew Arnold	41
Amaryllis	42
Kosmos	43
Zola	44
The Pity of the Leaves	45
Aaron Stark	46
The Garden	47
Cliff Klingenhagen	48
Charles Carville's Eyes	49
The Dead Village	50
Boston	51
Two Sonnets	52
The Clerks	54
Fleming Helphenstine	55
For a Book by Thomas Hardy	56
Thomas Hood	57
The Miracle	58
Horace to Leuconoë	59
Reuben Bright	60
The Altar	61
The Tavern	62
Sonnet	63
George Crabbe	64
Credo	65

CONTENTS

	PAGE
On the Night of a Friend's Wedding	66
Sonnet	67
Verlaine	68
Sonnet	69
Supremacy	70
The Night Before	71
Walt Whitman	85
The Chorus of Old Men in "Ægeus"	86
The Wilderness	88
Octaves	91
Two Quatrains	116
Romance	118
The Torrent	120
L'Envoi	121

THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

For those that never know the light,
The darkness is a sullen thing;
And they, the Children of the Night,
Seem lost in Fortune's winnowing.

But some are strong and some are weak, —
And there 's the story. House and home
Are shut from countless hearts that seek
World-refuge that will never come.

And if there be no other life,
And if there be no other chance
To weigh their sorrow and their strife
Than in the scales of circumstance,

'T were better, ere the sun go down
Upon the first day we embark,
In life's imbittered sea to drown,
Than sail forever in the dark.

But if there be a soul on earth
So blinded with its own misuse
Of man's revealed, incessant worth,
Or worn with anguish, that it views

No light but for a mortal eye,
No rest but of a mortal sleep,
No God but in a prophet's lie,
No faith for "honest doubt" to keep;

If there be nothing, good or bad,
  But chaos for a soul to trust, —
God counts it for a soul gone mad,
  And if God be God, He is just.

And if God be God, He is Love;
  And though the Dawn be still so dim,
It shows us we have played enough
  With creeds that make a fiend of Him.

There is one creed, and only one,
  That glorifies God's excellence;
So cherish, that His will be done,
  The common creed of common sense.

It is the crimson, not the gray,
  That charms the twilight of all time;
It is the promise of the day
  That makes the starry sky sublime;

It is the faith within the fear
  That holds us to the life we curse; —
So let us in ourselves revere
  The Self which is the Universe!

Let us, the Children of the Night,
  Put off the cloak that hides the scar!
Let us be Children of the Light,
  And tell the ages what we are!

THREE QUATRAINS

I

As long as Fame's imperious music rings
  Will poets mock it with crowned words august;
And haggard men will clamber to be kings
  As long as Glory weighs itself in dust.

THREE QUATRAINS

II

Drink to the splendor of the unfulfilled,
Nor shudder for the revels that are done:
The wines that flushed Lucullus are all spilled,
The strings that Nero fingered are all gone.

THREE QUATRAINS

III

We cannot crown ourselves with everything,
Nor can we coax the Fates for us to quarrel:
No matter what we are, or what we sing,
Time finds a withered leaf in every laurel.

THE WORLD

Some are the brothers of all humankind,
And own them, whatsoever their estate;
And some, for sorrow and self-scorn, are blind
With enmity for man's unguarded fate.

For some there is a music all day long
Like flutes in Paradise, they are so glad;
And there is hell's eternal under-song
Of curses and the cries of men gone mad.

Some say the Scheme with love stands luminous,
Some say 't were better back to chaos hurled;
And so 't is what we are that makes for us
The measure and the meaning of the world.

AN OLD STORY

Strange that I did not know him then,
That friend of mine!
I did not even show him then
One friendly sign;

But cursed him for the ways he had
To make me see
My envy of the praise he had
For praising me.

I would have rid the earth of him
Once, in my pride! . . .
I never knew the worth of him
Until he died.

BALLADE OF A SHIP

Down by the flash of the restless water
The dim White Ship like a white bird lay;
Laughing at life and the world they sought her,
And out she swung to the silvering bay.
Then off they flew on their roystering way,
And the keen moon fired the light foam flying
Up from the flood where the faint stars play,
And the bones of the brave in the wave are lying.

'T was a king's fair son with a king's fair daughter,
And full three hundred beside, they say, —
Revelling on for the lone, cold slaughter
So soon to seize them and hide them for aye;
But they danced and they drank and their souls grew gay,
Nor ever they knew of a ghoul's eye spying
Their splendor a flickering phantom to stray
Where the bones of the brave in the wave are lying.

BALLADE OF A SHIP

Through the mist of a drunken dream they brought her
(This wild white bird) for the sea-fiend's prey:
The pitiless reef in his hard clutch caught her,
And hurled her down where the dead men stay.
A torturing silence of wan dismay —
Shrieks and curses of mad souls dying —
Then down they sank to slumber and sway
Where the bones of the brave in the wave are lying.

ENVOY

Prince, do you sleep to the sound alway
Of the mournful surge and the sea-birds' crying? —
Or does love still shudder and steel still slay,
Where the bones of the brave in the wave are lying?

BALLADE BY THE FIRE

Slowly I smoke and hug my knee,
The while a witless masquerade
Of things that only children see
Floats in a mist of light and shade:
They pass, a flimsy cavalcade,
And with a weak, remindful glow,
The falling embers break and fade,
As one by one the phantoms go.

Then, with a melancholy glee
To think where once my fancy strayed,
I muse on what the years may be
Whose coming tales are all unsaid,
Till tongs and shovel, snugly laid
Within their shadowed niches, grow
By grim degrees to pick and spade,
As one by one the phantoms go.

BALLADE BY THE FIRE

But then, what though the mystic Three
  Around me ply their merry trade? —
And Charon soon may carry me
  Across the gloomy Stygian glade? —
  Be up, my soul! nor be afraid
Of what some unborn year may show;
  But mind your human debts are paid,
As one by one the phantoms go.

ENVOY

Life is the game that must be played:
  This truth at least, good friend, we know;
So live and laugh, nor be dismayed
  As one by one the phantoms go.

BALLADE OF BROKEN FLUTES

(To A. T. Schumann.)

In dreams I crossed a barren land,
A land of ruin, far away ;
Around me hung on every hand
A deathful stillness of decay ;
And silent, as in bleak dismay
That song should thus forsaken be,
On that forgotten ground there lay
The broken flutes of Arcady.

The forest that was all so grand
When pipes and tabors had their sway
Stood leafless now, a ghostly band
Of skeletons in cold array.
A lonely surge of ancient spray
Told of an unforgetful sea,
But iron blows had hushed for aye
The broken flutes of Arcady.

BALLADE OF BROKEN FLUTES

No more by summer breezes fanned,
The place was desolate and gray ;
But still my dream was to command
New life into that shrunken clay.
I tried it. Yes, you scan to-day,
With uncommiserating glee,
The songs of one who strove to play
The broken flutes of Arcady.

ENVOY

So, Rock, I join the common fray,
To fight where Mammon may decree;
And leave, to crumble as they may,
The broken flutes of Arcady.

BALLADE OF DEAD FRIENDS

As we the withered ferns
  By the roadway lying,
Time, the jester, spurns
  All our prayers and prying —
  All our tears and sighing,
Sorrow, change, and woe —
  All our where-and-whying
For friends that come and go.

Life awakes and burns,
  Age and death defying,
Till at last it learns
  All but Love is dying;
  Love's the trade we're plying,
God has willed it so;
  Shrouds are what we're buying
For friends that come and go.

BALLADE OF DEAD FRIENDS

Man forever yearns
  For the thing that 's flying.
Everywhere he turns,
  Men to dust are drying, —
  Dust that wanders, eying
(With eyes that hardly glow)
  New faces, dimly spying
For friends that come and go.

ENVOY

And thus we all are nighing
  The truth we fear to know:
Death will end our crying
  For friends that come and go.

HER EYES

Up from the street and the crowds that went,
Morning and midnight, to and fro,
Still was the room where his days he spent,
And the stars were bleak, and the nights were slow.

Year after year, with his dream shut fast,
He suffered and strove till his eyes were dim,
For the love that his brushes had earned at last, —
And the whole world rang with the praise of him.

But he cloaked his triumph, and searched, instead,
Till his cheeks were sere and his hairs were gray.
"There are women enough, God knows," he said. . . .
"There are stars enough — when the sun 's away."

Then he went back to the same still room
That had held his dream in the long ago,
When he buried his days in a nameless tomb,
And the stars were bleak, and the nights were slow.

And a passionate humor seized him there —
Seized him and held him until there grew
Like life on his canvas, glowing and fair,
A perilous face — and an angel's, too.

HER EYES

Angel and maiden, and all in one, —
All but the eyes. — They were there, but yet
They seemed somehow like a soul half done.
What was the matter? Did God forget? . . .

But he wrought them at last with a skill so sure
That her eyes were the eyes of a deathless woman, —
With a gleam of heaven to make them pure,
And a glimmer of hell to make them human.

God never forgets. — And he worships her
There in that same still room of his,
For his wife, and his constant arbiter
Of the world that was and the world that is.

And he wonders yet what her love could be
To punish him after that strife so grim;
But the longer he lives with her eyes to see,
The plainer it all comes back to him.

TWO MEN

THERE be two men of all mankind
That I should like to know about;
But search and question where I will,
I cannot ever find them out.

Melchizedek he praised the Lord,
And gave some wine to Abraham;
But who can tell what else he did
Must be more learned than I am.

Ucalegon he lost his house
When Agamemnon came to Troy;
But who can tell me who he was —
I'll pray the gods to give him joy.

There be two men of all mankind
That I'm forever thinking on:
They chase me everywhere I go, —
Melchizedek, Ucalegon.

VILLANELLE OF CHANGE

Since Persia fell at Marathon,
The yellow years have gathered fast:
Long centuries have come and gone.

And yet (they say) the place will don
A phantom fury of the past,
Since Persia fell at Marathon;

And as of old, when Helicon
Trembled and swayed with rapture vast
(Long centuries have come and gone),

This ancient plain, when night comes on,
Shakes to a ghostly battle-blast,
Since Persia fell at Marathon.

But into soundless Acheron
The glory of Greek shame was cast:
Long centuries have come and gone,

The suns of Hellas have all shone,
The first has fallen to the last: —
Since Persia fell at Marathon,
Long centuries have come and gone.

"WHERE are you going to-night, to-night, —
Where are you going, John Evereldown?
There's never the sign of a star in sight,
Nor a lamp that's nearer than Tilbury Town.
Why do you stare as a dead man might?
Where are you pointing away from the light?
And where are you going to-night, to-night, —
Where are you going, John Evereldown?"

"Right through the forest, where none can see,
There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town.
The men are asleep, — or awake, may be, —
But the women are calling John Evereldown.
Ever and ever they call for me,
And while they call can a man be free?
So right through the forest, where none can see,
There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town."

"But why are you going so late, so late, —
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?
Though the road be smooth and the path be straight,
  There are two long leagues to Tilbury Town.
Come in by the fire, old man, and wait!
Why do you chatter out there by the gate?
And why are you going so late, so late, —
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?"

"I follow the women wherever they call, —
  That's why I'm going to Tilbury Town.
God knows if I pray to be done with it all,
  But God is no friend to John Evereldown.
So the clouds may come and the rain may fall,
The shadows may creep and the dead men crawl, —
But I follow the women wherever they call,
  And that's why I'm going to Tilbury Town."

LUKE HAVERGAL

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal, —
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall, —
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The wind will moan, the leaves will whisper some —
Whisper of her, and strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal —
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that 's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies —
In eastern skies.

LUKE HAVERGAL

Out of a grave I come to tell you this, —
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is, —
Bitter, but one that faith can never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this —
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, — for the winds are tearing them away, —
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go! and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal —
Luke Havergal.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray
Around that sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

RICHARD CORY

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich, — yes, richer than a king, —
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

TWO OCTAVES

I

Not by the grief that stuns and overwhelms
All outward recognition of revealed
And righteous omnipresence are the days
Of most of us affrighted and diseased,
But rather by the common snarls of life
That come to test us and to strengthen us
In this the prentice-age of discontent,
Rebelliousness, faint-heartedness, and shame.

TWO OCTAVES

II

When through hot fog the fulgid sun looks down
Upon a stagnant earth where listless men
Laboriously dawdle, curse, and sweat,
Disqualified, unsatisfied, inert, —
It seems to me somehow that God himself
Scans with a close reproach what I have done,
Counts with an unphrased patience my arrears,
And fathoms my unprofitable thoughts.

CALVARY

Friendless and faint, with martyred steps and slow,
Faint for the flesh, but for the spirit free,
Stung by the mob that came to see the show,
The Master toiled along to Calvary ;
We gibed him, as he went, with houndish glee,
Till his dimmed eyes for us did overflow ;
We cursed his vengeless hands thrice wretchedly, —
And this was nineteen hundred years ago.

But after nineteen hundred years the shame
Still clings, and we have not made good the loss
That outraged faith has entered in his name.
Ah, when shall come love's courage to be strong !
Tell me, O Lord — tell me, O Lord, how long
Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross !

DEAR FRIENDS

Dear friends, reproach me not for what I do,
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say
That I am wearing half my life away
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.
And if my bubbles be too small for you,
Blow bigger then your own: the games we play
To fill the frittered minutes of a day,
Good glasses are to read the spirit through.

And whoso reads may get him some shrewd skill;
And some unprofitable scorn resign,
To praise the very thing that he deplores;
So, friends (dear friends), remember, if you will,
The shame I win for singing is all mine,
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

THE STORY OF THE ASHES AND THE FLAME

No matter why, nor whence, nor when she came,
There was her place. No matter what men said,
No matter what she was; living or dead,
Faithful or not, he loved her all the same.
The story was as old as human shame,
But ever since that lonely night she fled,
With books to blind him, he had only read
The story of the ashes and the flame.

There she was always coming pretty soon
To fool him back, with penitent scared eyes
That had in them the laughter of the moon
For baffled lovers, and to make him think —
Before she gave him time enough to wink —
Sin's kisses were the keys to Paradise.

FOR SOME POEMS BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

Sweeping the chords of Hellas with firm hand,
He wakes lost echoes from song's classic shore,
And brings their crystal cadence back once more
To touch the clouds and sorrows of a land
Where God's truth, cramped and fettered with a band
Of iron creeds, he cheers with golden lore
Of heroes and the men that long before
Wrought the romance of ages yet unscanned.

Still does a cry through sad Valhalla go
For Balder, pierced with Lok's unhappy spray —
For Balder, all but spared by Frea's charms;
And still does art's imperial vista show,
On the hushed sands of Oxus, far away,
Young Sohrab dying in his father's arms.

AMARYLLIS

Once, when I wandered in the woods alone,
An old man tottered up to me and said,
"Come, friend, and see the grave that I have made
For Amaryllis." There was in the tone
Of his complaint such quaver and such moan
That I took pity on him and obeyed,
And long stood looking where his hands had laid
An ancient woman, shrunk to skin and bone.

Far out beyond the forest I could hear
The calling of loud progress, and the bold
Incessant scream of commerce ringing clear;
But though the trumpets of the world were glad,
It made me lonely and it made me sad
To think that Amaryllis had grown old.

Ah, — shuddering men that falter and shrink so
To look on death, — what were the days we live,
Where life is half a struggle to forgive,
But for the love that finds us when we go?
Is God a jester? Does he laugh and throw
Poor branded wretches here to sweat and strive
For some vague end that never shall arrive?
And is He not yet weary of the show?

Think of it, all ye millions that have planned,
And only planned, the largess of hard youth!
Think of it, all ye builders on the sand,
Whose works are down! — Is love so small, forsooth?
Be brave! To-morrow you will understand
The doubt, the pain, the triumph, and the Truth!

ZOLA

Because he puts the compromising chart
Of hell before your eyes, you are afraid;
Because he counts the price that you have paid
For innocence, and counts it from the start,
You loathe him. But he sees the human heart
Of God meanwhile, and in God's hand has weighed
Your squeamish and emasculate crusade
Against the grim dominion of his art.

Never until we conquer the uncouth
Connivings of our shamed indifference
(We call it Christian faith!) are we to scan
The racked and shrieking hideousness of Truth
To find, in hate's polluted self-defence
Throbbing, the pulse, the divine heart of man.

THE PITY OF THE LEAVES

Vengeful across the cold November moors,
Loud with ancestral shame there came the bleak
Sad wind that shrieked, and answered with a shriek,
Reverberant through lonely corridors.
The old man heard it; and he heard, perforce,
Words out of lips that were no more to speak —
Words of the past that shook the old man's cheek
Like dead, remembered footsteps on old floors.

And then there were the leaves that plagued him so!
The brown, thin leaves that on the stones outside
Skipped with a freezing whisper. Now and then
They stopped, and stayed there — just to let him know
How dead they were; but if the old man cried,
They fluttered off like withered souls of men.

AARON STARK

Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark, —
Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled, and morose.
A miser was he, with a miser's nose,
And eyes like little dollars in the dark.
His thin, pinched mouth was nothing but a mark;
And when he spoke there came like sullen blows
Through scattered fangs a few snarled words and close,
As if a cur were chary of its bark.

Glad for the murmur of his hard renown,
Year after year he shambled through the town, —
A loveless exile moving with a staff;
And oftentimes there crept into his ears
A sound of alien pity, touched with tears, —
And then (and only then) did Aaron laugh.

THE GARDEN

THERE is a fenceless garden overgrown
With buds and blossoms and all sorts of leaves;
And once, among the roses and the sheaves,
The Gardener and I were there alone.
He led me to the plot where I had thrown
The fennel of my days on wasted ground,
And in that riot of sad weeds I found
The fruitage of a life that was my own.

My life! Ah, yes, there was my life, indeed!
And there were all the lives of humankind;
And they were like a book that I could read,
Whose every leaf, miraculously signed,
Outrolled itself from Thought's eternal seed,
Love-rooted in God's garden of the mind.

CLIFF KLINGENHAGEN

Cliff Klingenhagen had me in to dine
With him one day; and after soup and meat,
And all the other things there were to eat,
Cliff took two glasses and filled one with wine
And one with wormwood. Then, without a sign
For me to choose at all, he took the draught
Of bitterness himself, and lightly quaffed
It off, and said the other one was mine.

And when I asked him what the deuce he meant
By doing that, he only looked at me
And grinned, and said it was a way of his.
And though I know the fellow, I have spent
Long time a-wondering when I shall be
As happy as Cliff Klingenhagen is.

CHARLES CARVILLE'S EYES

A MELANCHOLY face Charles Carville had,
But not so melancholy as it seemed, —
When once you knew him, — for his mouth redeemed
His insufficient eyes, forever sad:
In them there was no life-glimpse, good or bad, —
Nor joy nor passion in them ever gleamed;
His mouth was all of him that ever beamed,
His eyes were sorry, but his mouth was glad.

He never was a fellow that said much,
And half of what he did say was not heard
By many of us: we were out of touch
With all his whims and all his theories
Till he was dead, so those blank eyes of his
Might speak them. Then we heard them, every word.

THE DEAD VILLAGE

HERE there is death. But even here, they say, —
Here where the dull sun shines this afternoon
As desolate as ever the dead moon
Did glimmer on dead Sardis, — men were gay;
And there were little children here to play,
With small soft hands that once did keep in tune
The strings that stretch from heaven, till too soon
The change came, and the music passed away.

Now there is nothing but the ghosts of things, —
No life, no love, no children, and no men;
And over the forgotten place there clings
The strange and unrememberable light
That is in dreams. The music failed, and then
God frowned, and shut the village from His sight.

BOSTON

My northern pines are good enough for me,
But there 's a town my memory uprears —
A town that always like a friend appears,
And always in the sunrise by the sea.
And over it, somehow, there seems to be
A downward flash of something new and fierce,
That ever strives to clear, but never clears
The dimness of a charmed antiquity.

TWO SONNETS

I

Just as I wonder at the twofold screen
Of twisted innocence that you would plait
For eyes that uncourageously await
The coming of a kingdom that has been,
So do I wonder what God's love can mean
To you that all so strangely estimate
The purpose and the consequent estate
Of one short shuddering step to the Unseen.

No, I have not your backward faith to shrink
Lone-faring from the doorway of God's home
To find Him in the names of buried men;
Nor your ingenious recreance to think
We cherish, in the life that is to come,
The scattered features of dead friends again.

TWO SONNETS

II

Never until our souls are strong enough
To plunge into the crater of the Scheme —
Triumphant in the flash there to redeem
Love's handsel and forevermore to slough,
Like cerements at a played-out masque, the rough
And reptile skins of us whereon we set
The stigma of scared years — are we to get
Where atoms and the ages are one stuff.

Nor ever shall we know the cursed waste
Of life in the beneficence divine
Of starlight and of sunlight and soul-shine
That we have squandered in sin's frail distress,
Till we have drunk, and trembled at the taste,
The mead of Thought's prophetic endlessness.

THE CLERKS

I did not think that I should find them there
When I came back again; but there they stood,
As in the days they dreamed of when young blood
Was in their cheeks and women called them fair.
Be sure, they met me with an ancient air, —
And yes, there was a shop-worn brotherhood
About them; but the men were just as good,
And just as human as they ever were.

And you that ache so much to be sublime,
And you that feed yourselves with your descent,
What comes of all your visions and your fears?
Poets and kings are but the clerks of Time,
Tiering the same dull webs of discontent,
Clipping the same sad alnage of the years.

FLEMING HELPHENSTINE

At first I thought there was a superfine
Persuasion in his face ; but the free glow
That filled it when he stopped and cried, "Hollo!"
Shone joyously, and so I let it shine.
He said his name was Fleming Helphenstine,
But be that as it may ; — I only know
He talked of this and that and So-and-So,
And laughed and chaffed like any friend of mine.

But soon, with a queer, quick frown, he looked at me,
And I looked hard at him ; and there we gazed
With a strained shame that made us cringe and wince :
Then, with a wordless clogged apology
That sounded half confused and half amazed,
He dodged, — and I have never seen him since.

FOR A BOOK BY THOMAS HARDY

With searching feet, through dark circuitous ways,
I plunged and stumbled; round me, far and near,
Quaint hordes of eyeless phantoms did appear,
Twisting and turning in a bootless chase, —
When, like an exile given by God's grace
To feel once more a human atmosphere,
I caught the world's first murmur, large and clear,
Flung from a singing river's endless race.

Then, through a magic twilight from below,
I heard its grand sad song as in a dream:
Life's wild infinity of mirth and woe
It sang me; and, with many a changing gleam,
Across the music of its onward flow
I saw the cottage lights of Wessex beam.

THOMAS HOOD

The man who cloaked his bitterness within
This winding-sheet of puns and pleasantries,
God never gave to look with common eyes
Upon a world of anguish and of sin:
His brother was the branded man of Lynn;
And there are woven with his jollities
The nameless and eternal tragedies
That render hope and hopelessness akin.

We laugh, and crown him; but anon we feel
A still chord sorrow-swept, — a weird unrest;
And thin dim shadows home to midnight steal,
As if the very ghost of mirth were dead —
As if the joys of time to dreams had fled,
Or sailed away with Ines to the West.

"DEAR brother, dearest friend, when I am dead,
And you shall see no more this face of mine,
Let nothing but red roses be the sign
Of the white life I lost for him," she said;
"No, do not curse him, — pity him instead;
Forgive him! — forgive me! . . God's anodyne
For human hate is pity; and the wine
That makes men wise, forgiveness. I have read
Love's message in love's murder, and I die."
And so they laid her just where she would lie, —
Under red roses. Red they bloomed and fell;
But when flushed autumn and the snows went by,
And spring came, — lo, from every bud's green shell
Burst a white blossom. — Can love reason why?

HORACE TO LEUCONOË

I PRAY you not, Leuconoë, to pore
With unpermitted eyes on what may be
Appointed by the gods for you and me,
Nor on Chaldean figures any more.
'T were infinitely better to implore
The present only: — whether Jove decree
More winters yet to come, or whether he
Make even this, whose hard, wave-eaten shore
Shatters the Tuscan seas to-day, the last —
Be wise withal, and rack your wine, nor fill
Your bosom with large hopes; for while I sing,
The envious close of time is narrowing; —
So seize the day, — or ever it be past, —
And let the morrow come for what it will.

REUBEN BRIGHT

Because he was a butcher and thereby
Did earn an honest living (and did right),
I would not have you think that Reuben Bright
Was any more a brute than you or I;
For when they told him that his wife must die,
He stared at them, and shook with grief and fright,
And cried like a great baby half that night,
And made the women cry to see him cry.

And after she was dead, and he had paid
The singers and the sexton and the rest,
He packed a lot of things that she had made
Most mournfully away in an old chest
Of hers, and put some chopped-up cedar boughs
In with them, and tore down the slaughter-house.

THE ALTAR

Alone, remote, nor witting where I went,
I found an altar builded in a dream —
A fiery place, whereof there was a gleam
So swift, so searching, and so eloquent
Of upward promise, that love's murmur, blent
With sorrow's warning, gave but a supreme
Unending impulse to that human stream
Whose flood was all for the flame's fury bent.

Alas! I said, — the world is in the wrong.
But the same quenchless fever of unrest
That thrilled the foremost of that martyred throng
Thrilled me, and I awoke . . . and was the same
Bewildered insect plunging for the flame
That burns, and must burn somehow for the best.

THE TAVERN

Whenever I go by there nowadays
And look at the rank weeds and the strange grass,
The torn blue curtains and the broken glass,
I seem to be afraid of the old place;
And something stiffens up and down my face,
For all the world as if I saw the ghost
Of old Ham Amory, the murdered host,
With his dead eyes turned on me all aglaze.

The Tavern has a story, but no man
Can tell us what it is. We only know
That once long after midnight, years ago,
A stranger galloped up from Tilbury Town,
Who brushed, and scared, and all but overran
That skirt-crazed reprobate, John Evereldown.

SONNET

Oh for a poet — for a beacon bright
To rift this changeless glimmer of dead gray;
To spirit back the Muses, long astray,
And flush Parnassus with a newer light;
To put these little sonnet-men to flight
Who fashion, in a shrewd, mechanic way,
Songs without souls, that flicker for a day,
To vanish in irrevocable night.

What does it mean, this barren age of ours?
Here are the men, the women, and the flowers,
The seasons, and the sunset, as before.
What does it mean? Shall not one bard arise
To wrench one banner from the western skies,
And mark it with his name forevermore?

GEORGE CRABBE

Give him the darkest inch your shelf allows,
Hide him in lonely garrets, if you will, —
But his hard, human pulse is throbbing still
With the sure strength that fearless truth endows.
In spite of all fine science disavows,
Of his plain excellence and stubborn skill
There yet remains what fashion cannot kill,
Though years have thinned the laurel from his brows.

Whether or not we read him, we can feel
From time to time the vigor of his name
Against us like a finger for the shame
And emptiness of what our souls reveal
In books that are as altars where we kneel
To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

CREDO

I CANNOT find my way: there is no star
In all the shrouded heavens anywhere;
And there is not a whisper in the air
Of any living voice but one so far
That I can hear it only as a bar
Of lost, imperial music, played when fair
And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.

No, there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
For one that welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
The black and awful chaos of the night;
For through it all,— above, beyond it all,—
I know the far-sent message of the years,
I feel the coming glory of the Light!

ON THE NIGHT OF A FRIEND'S WEDDING

If ever I am old, and all alone,
I shall have killed one grief, at any rate;
For then, thank God, I shall not have to wait
Much longer for the sheaves that I have sown.
The devil only knows what I have done,
But here I am, and here are six or eight
Good friends, who most ingenuously prate
About my songs to such and such a one.

But everything is all askew to-night, —
As if the time were come, or almost come,
For their untenanted mirage of me
To lose itself and crumble out of sight,
Like a tall ship that floats above the foam
A little while, and then breaks utterly.

SONNET

The master and the slave go hand in hand,
Though touch be lost. The poet is a slave,
And there be kings do sorrowfully crave
The joyance that a scullion may command.
But, ah, the sonnet-slave must understand
The mission of his bondage, or the grave
May clasp his bones, or ever he shall save
The perfect word that is the poet's wand !

The sonnet is a crown, whereof the rhymes
Are for Thought's purest gold the jewel-stones ;
But shapes and echoes that are never done
Will haunt the workshop, as regret sometimes
Will bring with human yearning to sad thrones
The crash of battles that are never won.

VERLAINE

Why do you dig like long-clawed scavengers
To touch the covered corpse of him that fled
The uplands for the fens, and rioted
Like a sick satyr with doom's worshippers?
Come! let the grass grow there; and leave his verse
To tell the story of the life he led.
Let the man go: let the dead flesh be dead,
And let the worms be its biographers.

Song sloughs away the sin to find redress
In art's complete remembrance: nothing clings
For long but laurel to the stricken brow
That felt the Muse's finger; nothing less
Than hell's fulfilment of the end of things
Can blot the star that shines on Paris now.

SONNET

When we can all so excellently give
The measure of love's wisdom with a blow, —
Why can we not in turn receive it so,
And end this murmur for the life we live ?
And when we do so frantically strive
To win strange faith, why do we shun to know
That in love's elemental over-glow
God's wholeness gleams with light superlative ?

Oh, brother men, if you have eyes at all,
Look at a branch, a bird, a child, a rose, —
Or anything God ever made that grows, —
Nor let the smallest vision of it slip,
Till you can read, as on Belshazzar's wall,
The glory of eternal partnership !

SUPREMACY

There is a drear and lonely tract of hell
From all the common gloom removed afar:
A flat, sad land it is, where shadows are,
Whose lorn estate my verse may never tell.
I walked among them and I knew them well:
Men I had slandered on life's little star
For churls and sluggards; and I knew the scar
Upon their brows of woe ineffable.

But as I went majestic on my way,
Into the dark they vanished, one by one,
Till, with a shaft of God's eternal day,
The dream of all my glory was undone, —
And, with a fool's importunate dismay,
I heard the dead men singing in the sun.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Look you, Dominie; look you, and listen!
Look in my face, first; search every line there;
Mark every feature, — chin, lip, and forehead!
Look in my eyes, and tell me the lesson
You read there; measure my nose, and tell me
Where I am wanting! A man's nose, Dominie,
Is often the cast of his inward spirit;
So mark mine well. But why do you smile so?
Pity, or what? Is it written all over,
This face of mine, with a brute's confession?
Nothing but sin there? nothing but hell-scars?
Or is it because there is something better —
A glimmer of good, maybe — or a shadow
Of something that's followed me down from childhood —
Followed me all these years and kept me,
Spite of my slips and sins and follies,
Spite of my last red sin, my murder, —
Just out of hell? Yes? something of that kind?
And you smile for that? You're a good man, Dominie,
The one good man in the world who knows me,—
My one good friend in a world that mocks me,
Here in this hard stone cage. But I leave it
To-morrow. To-morrow! My God! am I crying?
Are these things tears? Tears! What! am I frightened?
I, who swore I should go to the scaffold
With big strong steps, and — No more. I thank you,

But no — I am all right now! No! — listen!
I am here to be hanged; to be hanged to-morrow
At six o'clock, when the sun is rising.
And why am I here? Not a soul can tell you
But this poor shivering thing before you,
This fluttering wreck of the man God made him,
For God knows what wild reason. Hear me,
And learn from my lips the truth of my story.
There 's nothing strange in what I shall tell you,
Nothing mysterious, nothing unearthly, —
But damnably human, — and you shall hear it.
Not one of those little black lawyers had guessed it;
The judge, with his big bald head, never knew it;
And the jury (God rest their poor souls!) never dreamed it.
Once there were three in the world who could tell it;
Now there are two. There 'll be two to-morrow, —
You, my friend, and — But there 's the story: —

When I was a boy the world was heaven.
I never knew then that the men and the women
Who petted and called me a brave big fellow
Were ever less happy than I; but wisdom —
Which comes with the years, you know — soon showed me
The secret of all my glittering childhood,
The broken key to the fairies' castle
That held my life in the fresh, glad season

When I was the king of the earth. Then slowly —
And yet so swiftly! — there came the knowledge
That the marvellous life I had lived was my life;
That the glorious world I had loved was my world;
And that every man, and every woman,
And every child was a different being,
Wrought with a different heat, and fired
With passions born of a single spirit;
That the pleasure I felt was not their pleasure,
Nor my sorrow — a kind of nameless pity
For something, I knew not what — their sorrow.
And thus was I taught my first hard lesson, —
The lesson we suffer the most in learning:
That a happy man is a man forgetful
Of all the torturing ills around him.
When or where I first met the woman
I cherished and made my wife, no matter.
Enough to say that I found her and kept her
Here in my heart with as pure a devotion
As ever Christ felt for his brothers. Forgive me
For naming His name in your patient presence;
But I feel my words, and the truth I utter
Is God's own truth. I loved that woman, —
Not for her face, but for something fairer,
Something diviner, I thought, than beauty:
I loved the spirit — the human something
That seemed to chime with my own condition,
And make soul-music when we were together;

And we were never apart, from the moment
My eyes flashed into her eyes the message
That swept itself in a quivering answer
Back through my strange lost being. My pulses
Leapt with an aching speed ; and the measure
Of this great world grew small and smaller,
Till it seemed the sky and the land and the ocean
Closed at last in a mist all golden
Around us two. And we stood for a season
Like gods outflung from chaos, dreaming
That we were the king and the queen of the fire
That reddened the clouds of love that held us
Blind to the new world soon to be ours —
Ours to seize and sway. The passion
Of that great love was a nameless passion,
Bright as the blaze of the sun at noonday,
Wild as the flames of hell ; but, mark you,
Never a whit less pure for its fervor.
The baseness in me (for I was human)
Burned like a worm, and perished ; and nothing
Was left me then but a soul that mingled
Itself with hers, and swayed and shuddered
In fearful triumph. When I consider
That helpless love and the cursed folly
That wrecked my life for the sake of a woman
Who broke with a laugh the chains of her marriage
(Whatever the word may mean), I wonder
If all the woe was her sin, or whether

The chains themselves were enough to lead her
In love's despite to break them. . . . Sinners
And saints — I say — are rocked in the cradle,
But never are known till the will within them
Speaks in its own good time. So I foster
Even to-night for the woman who wronged me,
Nothing of hate, nor of love, but a feeling
Of still regret; for the man — But hear me,
And judge for yourself: —

For a time the seasons
Changed and passed in a sweet succession
That seemed to me like an endless music:
Life was a rolling psalm, and the choirs
Of God were glad for our love. I fancied
All this, and more than I dare to tell you
To-night, — yes, more than I dare to remember;
And then — well, the music stopped. There are moments
In all men's lives when it stops, I fancy, —
Or seems to stop, — till it comes to cheer them
Again with a larger sound. The curtain
Of life just then is lifted a little
To give to their sight new joys — new sorrows —
Or nothing at all, sometimes. I was watching
The slow, sweet scenes of a golden picture,
Flushed and alive with a long delusion
That made the murmur of home, when I shuddered

And felt like a knife that awful silence
That comes when the music goes — forever.
The truth came over my life like a darkness
Over a forest where one man wanders,
Worse than alone. For a time I staggered
And stumbled on with a weak persistence
After the phantom of hope that darted
And dodged like a frightened thing before me,
To quit me at last, and vanish. Nothing
Was left me then but the curse of living
And bearing through all my days the fever
And thirst of a poisoned love. Were I stronger,
Or weaker, perhaps my scorn had saved me,
Given me strength to crush my sorrow
With hate for her and the world that praised her —
To have left her, then and there — to have conquered
That old false life with a new and a wiser, —
Such things are easy in words. You listen,
And frown, I suppose, that I never mention
That beautiful word, *forgive!* — I forgave her
First of all; and I praised kind Heaven
That I was a brave, clean man to do it;
And then I tried to forget. Forgiveness!
What does it mean when the one forgiven
Shivers and weeps and clings and kisses
The credulous fool that holds her, and tells him
A thousand things of a good man's mercy,
And then slips off with a laugh and plunges

Back to the sin she has quit for a season,
To tell him that hell and the world are better
For her than a prophet's heaven? Believe me,
The love that dies ere its flames are wasted
In search of an alien soul is better,
Better by far than the lonely passion
That burns back into the heart that feeds it.
For I loved her still, and the more she mocked me, —
Fooled with her endless pleading promise
Of future faith, — the more I believed her
The penitent thing she seemed; and the stronger
Her choking arms and her small hot kisses
Bound me and burned my brain to pity,
The more she grew to the heavenly creature
That brightened the life I had lost forever.
The truth was gone somehow for the moment;
The curtain fell for a time; and I fancied
We were again like gods together,
Loving again with the old glad rapture.
But scenes like these, too often repeated,
Failed at last, and her guile was wasted.
I made an end of her shrewd caresses
And told her a few straight words. She took them
Full at their worth — and the farce was over.

. . . . . .

At first my dreams of the past upheld me,
But they were a short support: the present
Pushed them away, and I fell. The mission

Of life (whatever it was) was blasted ;
My game was lost. And I met the winner
Of that foul deal as a sick slave gathers
His painful strength at the sight of his master ;
And when he was past I cursed him, fearful
Of that strange chance which makes us mighty
Or mean, or both. I cursed him and hated
The stones he pressed with his heel ; I followed
His easy march with a backward envy,
And cursed myself for the beast within me.
But pride is the master of love, and the vision
Of those old days grew faint and fainter :
The counterfeit wife my mercy sheltered
Was nothing now but a woman, — a woman
Out of my way and out of my nature.
My battle with blinded love was over,
My battle with aching pride beginning.
If I was the loser at first, I wonder
If I am the winner now ! . . . I doubt it.
My life is a losing game ; and to-morrow —
To-morrow ! — Christ ! did I say to-morrow ? . . .
Is your brandy good for death ? . . . There, — listen : —

When loves goes out, and a man is driven
To shun mankind for the scars that make him
A joke for all chattering tongues, he carries
A double burden. The woes I suffered
After that hard betrayal made me

Pity, at first, all breathing creatures
On this bewildered earth. I studied
Their faces and made for myself the story
Of all their scattered lives. Like brothers
And sisters they seemed to me then ; and I nourished
A stranger friendship wrought in my fancy
Between those people and me. But somehow,
As time went on, there came queer glances
Out of their eyes, and the shame that stung me
Harassed my pride with a crazed impression
That every face in the surging city
Was turned to me ; and I saw sly whispers,
Now and then, as I walked and wearied
My wasted life twice over in bearing
With all my sorrow the sorrows of others, —
Till I found myself their fool. Then I trembled, —
A poor scared thing, — and their prying faces
Told me the ghastly truth : they were laughing
At me and my fate. My God, I could feel it —
That laughter ! And then the children caught it ;
And I, like a struck dog, crept and listened.
And then when I met the man who had weakened
A woman's love to his own desire,
It seemed to me that all hell were laughing
In fiendish concert ! I was their victim —
And his, and hate's. And there was the struggle !
As long as the earth we tread holds something
A tortured heart can love, the meaning

Of life is not wholly blurred ; but after
The last loved thing in the world has left us,
We know the triumph of hate. The glory
Of good goes out forever ; the beacon
Of sin is the light that leads us downward —
Down to the fiery end. The road runs
Right through hell ; and the souls that follow
The cursed ways where its windings lead them
Suffer enough, I say, to merit
All grace that a God can give. — The fashion
Of our belief is to lift all beings
Born for a life that knows no struggle
In sin's tight snares to eternal glory —
All apart from the branded millions
Who carry through life their faces graven
With sure brute scars that tell the story
Of their foul, fated passions. Science
Has yet no salve to smooth or soften
The cradle-scars of a tyrant's visage ;
No drug to purge from the vital essence
Of souls the sleeping venom. Virtue
May flower in hell, when its roots are twisted
And wound with the roots of vice ; but the stronger
Never is known till there comes that battle
With sin to prove the victor. Perilous
Things are these demons we call our passions :
Slaves are we of their roving fancies,
Fools of their devilish glee. — You think me,

I know, in this maundering way designing
To lighten the load of my guilt and cast it
Half on the shoulders of God. But hear me!
I 'm partly a man, — for all my weakness, —
If weakness it were to stand and murder
Before men's eyes the man who had murdered
Me, and driven my burning forehead
With horns for the world to laugh at. Trust me!
And try to believe my words but a portion
Of what God's purpose made me! The coward
Within me cries for this ; and I beg you
Now, as I come to the end, to remember
That women and men are on earth to travel
All on a different road. Hereafter
The roads may meet. . . . I trust in something —
I know not what. . . .

Well, this was the way of it : —
Stung with the shame and the secret fury
That comes to the man who has thrown his pittance
Of self at a traitor's feet, I wandered
Weeks and weeks in a baffled frenzy,
Till at last the devil spoke. I heard him,
And laughed at the love that strove to touch me, —
The dead, lost love ; and I gripped the demon
Close to my breast, and held him, praising
The fates and the furies that gave me the courage
To follow his wild command. Forgetful

Of all to come when the work was over,—
There came to me then no stony vision
Of these three hundred days, — I cherished
An awful joy in my brain. I pondered
And weighed the thing in my mind, and gloried
In life to think that I was to conquer
Death at his own dark door, — and chuckled
To think of it done so cleanly. One evening
I knew that my time had come. I shuddered
A little, but rather for doubt than terror,
And followed him, — led by the nameless devil
I worshipped and called my brother. The city
Shone like a dream that night ; the windows
Flashed with a piercing flame, and the pavements
Pulsed and swayed with a warmth — or something
That seemed so then to my feet — and thrilled me
With a quick, dizzy joy ; and the women
And men, like marvellous things of magic,
Floated and laughed and sang by my shoulder,
Sent with a wizard motion. Through it
And over and under it all there sounded
A murmur of life, like bees ; and I listened
And laughed again to think of the flower
That grew, blood-red, for me ! . . . This fellow
Was one of the popular sort who flourish
Unruffled where gods would fall. For a conscience
He carried a snug deceit that made him
The man of the time and the place, whatever

The time or the place might be. Were he sounding,
With a genial craft that cloaked its purpose,
Nigh to itself, the depth of a woman
Fooled with his brainless art, or sending
The midnight home with songs and bottles, —
The cad was there, and his ease forever
Shone with the smooth and slippery polish
That tells the snake. That night he drifted
Into an up-town haunt and ordered —
Whatever it was — with a soft assurance
That made me mad as I stood behind him,
Gripping his death, and waited. Coward,
I think, is the name the world has given
To men like me; but I 'll swear I never
Thought of my own disgrace when I shot him —
Yes, in the back, — I know it, I know it
Now; but what if I do? . . . As I watched him
Lying there dead in the scattered sawdust,
Wet with a day's blown froth, I noted
That things were still; that the walnut tables,
Where men but a moment before were sitting,
Were gone; that a screen of something around me
Shut them out of my sight. But the gilded
Signs of a hundred beers and whiskeys
Flashed from the walls above, and the mirrors
And glasses behind the bar were lighted
In some strange way, and into my spirit
A thousand shafts of terrible fire

Burned like death, and I fell. The story
Of what came then, you know.

But tell me,
What does the whole thing mean? What are we, —
Slaves of an awful ignorance? puppets
Pulled by a fiend? or gods, without knowing it?
Do we shut from ourselves our own salvation, —
Or what do we do! I tell you, Dominie,
There are times in the lives of us poor devils
When heaven and hell get mixed. Though conscience
May come like a whisper of Christ to warn us
Away from our sins, it is lost or laughed at, —
And then we fall. And for all who have fallen —
Even for him — I hold no malice,
Nor much compassion: a mightier mercy
Than mine must shrive him. — And I — I am going
Into the light? — or into the darkness?
Why do I sit through these sickening hours,
And hope? Good God! are they hours? — hours?
Yes! I am done with days. And to-morrow —
We two may meet! To-morrow! — To-morrow! . . .

WALT WHITMAN

The master-songs are ended, and the man
That sang them is a name. And so is God
A name; and so is love, and life, and death,
And everything. But we, who are too blind
To read what we have written, or what faith
Has written for us, do not understand:
We only blink, and wonder.

Last night it was the song that was the man,
But now it is the man that is the song.
We do not hear him very much to-day:
His piercing and eternal cadence rings
Too pure for us — too powerfully pure,
Too lovingly triumphant, and too large;
But there are some that hear him, and they know
That he shall sing to-morrow for all men,
And that all time shall listen.

The master-songs are ended? Rather say
No songs are ended that are ever sung,
And that no names are dead names. When we write
Men's letters on proud marble or on sand,
We write them there forever.

THE CHORUS OF OLD MEN IN "ÆGEUS"

Ye gods that have a home beyond the world,
Ye that have eyes for all man's agony,
Ye that have seen this woe that we have seen,—
Look with a just regard,
And with an even grace,
Here on the shattered corpse of a shattered king,
Here on a suffering world where men grow old
And wander like sad shadows till, at last,
Out of the flare of life,
Out of the whirl of years,
Into the mist they go,
Into the mist of death.

O shades of you that loved him long before
The cruel threads of that black sail were spun,
May loyal arms and ancient welcomings
Receive him once again
Who now no longer moves
Here in this flickering dance of changing days,
Where a battle is lost and won for a withered wreath,
And the black master Death is over all,
To chill with his approach,
To level with his touch,
The reigning strength of youth,
The fluttered heart of age.

THE CHORUS OF OLD MEN IN "ÆGEUS"

Woe for the fateful day when Delphi's word was lost —
Woe for the loveless prince of Æthra's line!
Woe for a father's tears and the curse of a king's release —
Woe for the wings of pride and the shafts of doom! —
And thou, the saddest wind
That ever blew from Crete,
Sing the fell tidings back to that thrice unhappy ship! —
Sing to the western flame,
Sing to the dying foam,
A dirge for the sundered years and a dirge for the years to be!

Better his end had been as the end of a cloudless day,
Bright, by the word of Zeus, with a golden star,
Wrought of a golden fame, and flung to the central sky,
To gleam on a stormless tomb for evermore: —
Whether or not there fell
To the touch of an alien hand
The sheen of his purple robe and the shine of his diadem,
Better his end had been
To die as an old man dies, —
But the fates are ever the fates, and a crown is ever a crown.

THE WILDERNESS

Come away! come away! there's a frost along the marshes,
And a frozen wind that skims the shoal where it shakes the dead black water;
There's a moan across the lowland and a wailing through the woodland
Of a dirge that sings to send us back to the arms of those that love us.
There is nothing left but ashes now where the crimson chills of autumn
Put off the summer's languor with a touch that made us glad
For the glory that is gone from us, with a flight we cannot follow,
To the slopes of other valleys and the sounds of other shores.

Come away! come away! you can hear them calling, calling,
Calling us to come to them, and roam no more.
Over there beyond the ridges and the land that lies between us,
There's an old song calling us to come!

Come away! come away! — for the scenes we leave behind us
Are barren for the lights of home and a flame that's young forever;

And the lonely trees around us creak the warning of the night-wind,
That love and all the dreams of love are away beyond the mountains.
The songs that call for us to-night, they have called for men before us,
And the winds that blow the message, they have blown ten thousand years;
But this will end our wander-time, for we know the joy that waits us
In the strangeness of home-coming, and a faithful woman's eyes.

Come away! come away! there is nothing now to cheer us —
Nothing now to comfort us, but love's road home: —
Over there beyond the darkness there's a window gleams to greet us,
And a warm hearth waits for us within.

Come away! come away! — or the roving-fiend will hold us,
And make us all to dwell with him to the end of human faring:
There are no men yet can leave him when his hands are clutched upon them,
There are none will own his enmity, there are none will call him brother.

So we 'll be up and on the way, and the less we brag
the better
For the freedom that God gave us and the dread we do
not know : —
The frost that skips the willow-leaf will again be back
to blight it,
And the doom we cannot fly from is the doom we do
not see.

Come away! come away! there are dead men all
around us —
Frozen men that mock us with a wild, hard laugh
That shrieks and sinks and whimpers in the shrill
November rushes,
And the long fall wind on the lake.

OCTAVES

I

To get at the eternal strength of things,
And fearlessly to make strong songs of it,
Is, to my mind, the mission of that man
The world would call a poet. He may sing
But roughly, and withal ungraciously ;
But if he touch to life the one right chord
Wherein God's music slumbers, and awake
To truth one drowsed ambition, he sings well.

II

We thrill too strangely at the master's touch;
We shrink too sadly from the larger self
Which for its own completeness agitates
And undetermines us; we do not feel —
We dare not feel it yet — the splendid shame
Of uncreated failure; we forget,
The while we groan, that God's accomplishment
Is always and unfailingly at hand.

OCTAVES

III

To mortal ears the plainest word may ring
Fantastic and unheard-of, and as false
And out of tune as ever to our own
Did ring the prayers of man-made maniacs;
But if that word be the plain word of Truth,
It leaves an echo that begets itself,
Persistent in itself and of itself,
Regenerate, reiterate, replete.

IV

Tumultuously void of a clean scheme
Whereon to build, whereof to formulate,
The legion life that riots in mankind
Goes ever plunging upward, up and down,
Most like some crazy regiment at arms,
Undisciplined of aught but Ignorance,
And ever led resourcelessly along
To brainless carnage by drunk trumpeters.

OCTAVES

V

To me the groaning of world-worshippers
Rings like a lonely music played in hell
By one with art enough to cleave the walls
Of heaven with his cadence, but without
The wisdom or the will to comprehend
The strangeness of his own perversity,
And all without the courage to deny
The profit and the pride of his defeat.

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VI

While we are drilled in error, we are lost
Alike to truth and usefulness. We think
We are great warriors now, and we can brag
Like Titans; but the world is growing young,
And we, the fools of time, are growing with it: —
We do not fight to-day, we only die;
We are too proud of death, and too ashamed
Of God, to know enough to be alive.

OCTAVES

VII

There is one battle-field whereon we fall
Triumphant and unconquered; but, alas!
We are too fleshly fearful of ourselves
To fight there till our days are whirled and blurred
By sorrow, and the ministering wheels
Of anguish take us eastward, where the clouds
Of human gloom are lost against the gleam
That shines on Thought's impenetrable mail.

VIII

When we shall hear no more the cradle-songs
Of ages — when the timeless hymns of Love
Defeat them and outsound them — we shall know
The rapture of that large release which all
Right science comprehends; and we shall read,
With unoppressed and unoffended eyes,
That record of All-Soul whereon God writes
In everlasting runes the truth of Him.

IX

The guerdon of new childhood is repose : —
Once he has read the primer of right thought,
A man may claim between two smithy strokes
Beatitude enough to realize
God's parallel completeness in the vague
And incommensurable excellence
That equitably uncreates itself
And makes a whirlwind of the Universe.

X

THERE is no loneliness: — no matter where
We go, nor whence we come, nor what good friends
Forsake us in the seeming, we are all
At one with a complete companionship;
And though forlornly joyless be the ways
We travel, the compensate spirit-gleams
Of Wisdom shaft the darkness here and there,
Like scattered lamps in unfrequented streets.

XI

When one that you and I had all but sworn
To be the purest thing God ever made
Bewilders us until at last it seems
An angel has come back restigmatized, —
Faith wavers, and we wonder what there is
On earth to make us faithful any more,
But never are quite wise enough to know
The wisdom that is in that wonderment.

XII

WHERE does a dead man go? — The dead man dies;
But the free life that would no longer feed
On fagots of outburned and shattered flesh
Wakes to a thrilled invisible advance,
Unchained (or fettered else) of memory;
And when the dead man goes it seems to me
'T were better for us all to do away
With weeping, and be glad that he is gone.

XIII

Still through the dusk of dead, blank-legended,
And unremunerative years we search
To get where life begins, and still we groan
Because we do not find the living spark
Where no spark ever was; and thus we die,
Still searching, like poor old astronomers
Who totter off to bed and go to sleep,
To dream of untriangulated stars.

XIV

With conscious eyes not yet sincere enough
To pierce the glimmered cloud that fluctuates
Between me and the glorifying light
That screens itself with knowledge, I discern
The searching rays of wisdom that reach through
The mist of shame's infirm credulity,
And infinitely wonder if hard words
Like mine have any message for the dead.

XV

I GRANT you friendship is a royal thing,
But none shall ever know that royalty
For what it is till he has realized
His best friend in himself. 'T is then, perforce,
That man's unfettered faith indemnifies
Of its own conscious freedom the old shame,
And love's revealed infinitude supplants
Of its own wealth and wisdom the old scorn.

XVI

Though the sick beast infect us, we are fraught
Forever with indissoluble Truth,
Wherein redress reveals itself divine,
Transitional, transcendent. Grief and loss,
Disease and desolation, are the dreams
Of wasted excellence; and every dream
Has in it something of an ageless fact
That flouts deformity and laughs at years.

XVII

We lack the courage to be where we are: —
We love too much to travel on old roads,
To triumph on old fields; we love too much
To consecrate the magic of dead things,
And yieldingly to linger by long walls
Of ruin, where the ruinous moonlight
That sheds a lying glory on old stones
Befriends us with a wizard's enmity.

OCTAVES

XVIII

Something as one with eyes that look below
The battle-smoke to glimpse the foeman's charge,
We through the dust of downward years may scan
The onslaught that awaits this idiot world
Where blood pays blood for nothing, and where life
Pays life to madness, till at last the ports
Of gilded helplessness be battered through
By the still crash of salvatory steel.

XIX

To you that sit with Sorrow like chained slaves,
And wonder if the night will ever come,
I would say this : The night will never come,
And sorrow is not always. But my words
Are not enough ; your eyes are not enough ;
The soul itself must insulate the Real,
Or ever you do cherish in this life —
In this life or in any life — repose.

XX

Like a white wall whereon forever breaks
Unsatisfied the tumult of green seas,
Man's unconjectured godliness rebukes
With its imperial silence the lost waves
Of insufficient grief. This mortal surge
That beats against us now is nothing else
Than plangent ignorance. Truth neither shakes
Nor wavers; but the world shakes, and we shriek.

XXI

Nor jewelled phrase nor mere mellifluous rhyme
Reverberates aright, or ever shall,
One cadence of that infinite plain-song
Which is itself all music. Stronger notes
Than any that have ever touched the world
Must ring to tell it — ring like hammer-blows,
Right-echoed of a chime primordial,
On anvils, in the gleaming of God's forge.

XXII

The prophet of dead words defeats himself:
Whoever would acknowledge and include
The foregleam and the glory of the real,
Must work with something else than pen and ink
And painful preparation: he must work
With unseen implements that have no names,
And he must win withal, to do that work,
Good fortitude, clean wisdom, and strong skill.

XXIII

To curse the chilled insistence of the dawn
Because the free gleam lingers; to defraud
The constant opportunity that lives
Unchallenged in all sorrow; to forget
For this large prodigality of gold
That larger generosity of thought, —
These are the fleshly clogs of human greed,
The fundamental blunders of mankind.

XXIV

Forebodings are the fiends of Recreance;
The master of the moment, the clean seer
Of ages, too securely scans what is,
Ever to be appalled at what is not;
He sees beyond the groaning borough lines
Of Hell, God's highways gleaming, and he knows
That Love's complete communion is the end
Of anguish to the liberated man.

XXV

Here by the windy docks I stand alone,
But yet companioned. There the vessel goes,
And there my friend goes with it; but the wake
That melts and ebbs between that friend and me
Love's earnest is of Life's all-purposeful
And all-triumphant sailing, when the ships
Of Wisdom loose their fretful chains and swing
Forever from the crumbled wharves of Time.

TWO QUATRAINS

I

UNITY

As eons of incalculable strife
Are in the vision of one moment caught,
So are the common, concrete things of life
Divinely shadowed on the walls of Thought.

TWO QUATRAINS

II

PARAPHRASE

We shriek to live, but no man ever lives
Till he has rid the ghost of human breath;
We dream to die, but no man ever dies
Till he has quit the road that runs to death.

ROMANCE

I

BOYS

We were all boys, and three of us were friends;
And we were more than friends, it seemed to me: —
Yes, we were more than brothers then, we three. . . .
Brothers? . . . But we were boys, and there it ends.

II

JAMES WETHERELL

We never half believed the stuff
They told about James Wetherell;
We always liked him well enough,
And always tried to use him well;
But now some things have come to light,
And James has vanished from our view,—
There is n't very much to write,
There is n't very much to do.

THE TORRENT

I FOUND a torrent falling in a glen
Where the sun's light shone silvered and leaf-split;
The boom, the foam, and the mad flash of it
All made a magic symphony; but when
I thought upon the coming of hard men
To cut those patriarchal trees away,
And turn to gold the silver of that spray,
I shuddered. Yet a gladness now and then
Did wake me to myself till I was glad
In earnest, and was welcoming the time
For screaming saws to sound above the chime
Of idle waters, and for me to know
The jealous visionings that I had had
Were steps to the great place where trees and torrents go.

L'ENVOI

Now in a thought, now in a shadowed word,
Now in a voice that thrills eternity,
Ever there comes an onward phrase to me
Of some transcendent music I have heard;
No piteous thing by soft hands dulcimered,
No trumpet crash of blood-sick victory,
But a glad strain of some still symphony
That no proud mortal touch has ever stirred.

There is no music in the world like this,
No character wherewith to set it down,
No kind of instrument to make it sing.
No kind of instrument? Ah, yes, there is!
And after time and place are overthrown,
God's touch will keep its one chord quivering.

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The children of the night.